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Air Guard remains experienced, ready force, its leader says

By Sgt. 1st Class Jon Soucy
National Guard Bureau

ARLINGTON, Va. (2/11/14) - The Air National Guard remains an experienced and ready force committed to both its state and federal missions, said Air Force Lt. Gen. Stanley E. Clarke III, director of the Air Guard, while addressing attendees at the Air Force Civic Leader Program Annual Conference at Joint Base Andrews, Md.

"I know for a fact that we have very good, experienced Airmen," Clarke said at the Feb. 6 event. "That experience translates to being a ready force for any mission."

During the conference, Clarke presented the 'State of the Air National Guard' to the Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III and more than 30 community leaders from across the nation.

The AFCLP members serve as key advisors and advocates on Air Force issues and foster relationships between the American public and the Air Force through personal contact, speeches and appearances.

"We have lots of people, lots of aircraft all out there doing a variety of missions all in support of a federal mission or a state mission," said Clarke. "Our Air National Guard force is the first choice for homeland operations, a proven choice for fighting wars, and an enduring force for global security cooperation."

And much of that experience comes from being part of the total force concept that integrates all three components of the Air Force-the regular Air Force, the Air Force Reserve and the Air Guard-into a variety of both training exercises and operational missions.

"The only reason we can always do these exercises or the actual deployments overseas the way we do it is that we do it as a total force," Clarke said. "The standards, the inspections, the operational engagement and the resources have always been there to make sure that happens. It's a great concept."

Clarke also explained to the AFCLP members that the Air Guard has a unique state mission.

"We have a dual-use force, constitutionally unique and able to respond to things in the homeland and support the mission overseas," Clarke said, adding that Air Guard members seamlessly fit in with local first responders.



Air Force Lt. Gen. Stanley E. Clarke III, director of the Air National Guard, addresses attendees at the Air Force Civic Leader Program Annual Conference at Joint Base Andrews, Md., Feb. 6, 2014. During the conference, Clarke spoke on the mission of the Air National Guard and how it fills both its state and federal mission. (U.S. Air Force photo by Jim Varhegyi/Released)

"When a disaster happens you want people who know how to organize, that don't run away from the gunfire," he said.

Clarke added that while Air Guard members have responded to highly visible disasters such as Hurricane Sandy and flooding in Colorado, there are also numerous other times they are called upon.

"It just goes on and on and on every day," he said. "It's not big, newsworthy items like Hurricane Sandy, but the Air Guard is doing something every day across the nation."

The Air Guard also plays an integral role in other homeland protection missions.

"We have a big piece of homeland air defense," said Clarke. "We have units scattered throughout the nation performing that mission 24 hours a day. That mission hasn't changed since 9/11."

The Air Guard also continues to build global partnerships.

"When it comes to global security cooperation, we are an enduring choice

because we have highly successful programs that have been going on for many years," Clarke said. "We have the 162nd (Fighter Wing) down in Tucson, Ariz., that performs international training on the F-16. We do advanced tactics training at St. Joseph, Mo., for the C-130. We also do overseas exercises that help build partnerships and relationships."

But, said Clarke, the National Guard's biggest security cooperation program is the State Partnership Program, which pairs countries with Army and Air National Guard elements to conduct military and civilian exchanges that benefit both countries.

"To me, it's one of the smartest programs that we have," Clarke said, adding that one of the reasons the SPP has been so successful in its 20-plus year history is because of the enduring relationships that have been built.

Being able to continue to seamlessly take part in SPP, protect the homeland and fight America's wars, Clarke explained, has helped the Air Guard reach record levels of readiness. "All of these missions require high levels of training and experienced Airmen to perform and to train others," he added.

It also requires Airmen to mobilize, Clarke noted.

"I always tell Air Guard members that if you wear this uniform, be prepared to be mobilized," he said. "It will happen. We are invested in almost every mission the Air Force performs."

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